

East Boston Times-Free Press
"Rising Stars of Massachusetts"
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Rising Stars of Massachusetts

Last week, early educators, parents and pre-kindergarten children from the East Boston YMCA traveled to the Statehouse to take part in the Rising Stars of Massachusetts celebration, an annual event sponsored by the Early Education for All Campaign to highlight the positive impact high quality early education has on young children and families.

Thousands of bright-colored stars, hand-decorated by children from across the commonwealth were on display during the ceremony, and the event opened with a welcome song from the Eastie YMCA's pre-kindergartners. The Y's Children's Center is a recipient of the Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Pilot Classroom Quality grant, awarded to early education providers that meet quality requirements established by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.

"The East Boston YMCA is a proud and appreciative recipient of a UPK grant," said Y Executive Director Joey Cuzzi, "As a result, we have additional funding to enhance training for pre-k teachers and offer a research-based curriculum to our children-- guaranteeing that Y children are learning and growing intellectually, emotionally and physically, ready for the leap to kindergarten."

Stressing the Bay State's national role in advancing early education, Secretary of Education Paul Reville said, "The greater nation is watching as this work, this star, rises in Massachusetts. The work that we do that reaches thousands of children in Massachusetts may ultimately reach millions in the U.S. and worldwide."

Despite the commonwealth's challenging economic circumstances, Reville pledged to "preserve the momentum we've built over time". Early education, he said, is "probably the most powerful, highly leveraged investment we can make in a 21st century educational system."

Research has shown that high quality early education has a lifetime impact on young learners in terms of greater academic readiness, higher test scores, and improved social skills. Low-income children who participate in two years of high quality early education programs are 40 percent less likely to need special education or be held back a grade, 30 percent more likely to graduate from high school, and twice as likely to go to college.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis estimates a 16 percent return for every dollar invested in high quality early education.

"Early educators like those at the East Boston YMCA are on the front lines, making a real difference in the lives of young children and families," said Campaign Director of Early Education for All Amy O'Leary. "Their important work truly deserves

to be celebrated. Even in challenging budgetary circumstances, high quality early education is an important investment for our commonwealth and our future."

Massachusetts, which created the nation's first consolidated Department of Early Education and Care, passed An Act Relative to Early Education and Care this summer, formally establishing the statewide Universal Pre-Kindergarten program. A recent evaluation by Abt Associates found evidence that UPK is working as planned, helping early education programs to achieve and sustain the high quality that is critical for children's success. (see photo page 7)

YMCA MEMBERS VISIT THE STATE HOUSE



On Wednesday, January 14, the YMCA visited Senator Anthony Petruccelli, Representative Carlo Basile and House Ways and Means Chairman Robert DeLeo at the Statehouse.